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C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 001571

SIPDIS
DEPT ALSO FOR P, SCA, DRL
AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO USOFFICE ALMATY
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [UZ](#)
SUBJECT: Uzbekistan Amnesties Sanjar Umarov

REF: TASHKENT 281

CLASSIFIED BY: Nicholas Berliner, Pol-Econ Chief; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Foreign Minister Norov told us that Sanjar Umarov will be released today (Nov. 5). Please note action request at para 6 (contingency press guidance). End Summary.

¶2. (C) Uzbek Foreign Minister Norov convoked the Ambassador today to inform us that jailed businessman and opposition figure Sanjar Umarov would be released today (Nov. 5). Norov said that Umarov is in good health and is free to do as he wishes, including traveling to the United States to join his family. Norov suggested that Umarov's wife not try to travel from the U.S. to Uzbekistan, but rather that Umarov travel there. He emphasized that President Karimov had given his word to Under Secretary Burns in July that Umarov would be amnestied and was following through on his promise as a sign of trust in the improving relationship with the U.S. Emphasizing that Umarov's release was a goodwill gesture on the part of the GOU, he said that it was in the mutual interest of the U.S. and Uzbekistan not to allow Umarov's release to become politicized or to repeat the high profile episode that followed Mutabar Tajibaeva's release when she was awarded the Secretary's Women of Courage Award in public ceremonies earlier this year (Reftel).

¶3. (C) The Ambassador told Norov that Umarov's release was a very positive signal that will help sustain the forward momentum that has been achieved in relations between the U.S. and Uzbekistan. He told Norov that the Embassy has conveyed the message to Umarov's family that trying to leverage political gain from his release could be counter-productive.

¶4. (C) Umarov is a U.S. Legal Permanent Resident. Through the family's representative in Tashkent, the Embassy will work to process a Returning Resident Immigrant Visa for Umarov quickly (much of the paperwork for which has already been prepared in anticipation of his release) and help him rejoin his family in Tennessee.

¶5. (C) Comment: Umarov's release is an example of quiet, behind-the-scenes diplomacy with the Uzbeks on sensitive human rights issues bearing fruit and is a clear indication that Karimov and the GOU are committed to improving bilateral relations with the U.S. Umarov, of course, is not the only prisoner we and the international community are concerned about in Uzbekistan and we

need to be careful, as Norov said, not to allow Umarov's case to become politicized or to have him emerge as a "cause celebre" for the Uzbek opposition community in the U.S. and elsewhere. The Uzbeks will be watching this carefully. Any perception that Umarov is being turned into an "opposition figure in exile" will draw an extremely negative reaction from Karimov and the GOU, who are already suspicious after the Tajibaeva episode. If Karimov feels that he gets burned on Umarov, we could see major setbacks not only in our bilateral relationship and Afghan transit, but more importantly in our ability to help other political prisoners in Uzbekistan, none less deserving than Umarov of amnesty and release. For this reason, it is extremely important that we counsel Umarov and his family, as well as interested Members of Congress and NGOs, to keep a relatively low public profile on this case. Subtle, positive reinforcement of this significant gesture could pay real dividends in the future and is the path to take. Likewise, it will be important to be circumspect in our own public statements about his release. The Embassy has drafted if-asked press guidance (para 5) for any inquiries (we expect there will be some) and would appreciate Washington clearance.

16. (SBU) Recommended State Department press guidance for use on an if-asked basis only: "We welcome the news that Mr. Umarov has been amnestied and will be returning to the care of his family in the United States. This humanitarian gesture is a further sign of deepening trust and understanding between the U.S. and Uzbekistan."
NORLAND